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FOR THE  
SUBSCRIPTION  
OF THE  
C L E R G Y  
TO THE  
THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES  
OF  
R E L I G I O N.

---

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M D C C L X V I I ,

# ADVERTISEMENT

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# ADVERTISEMENT

TO THE

R E A D E R.

*THE following papers are compiled from the author's marginal remarks upon a book, intituled, "The Confessional." Though not sufficiently armed with ordnance of all sorts, fit for a spirited attack; yet passing by the smaller vessels of light burden, he makes it a point of honour to engage the stoutest of their convoy.*

Non metus; OFFICIO neque se certare priorem  
Pœniteat.

*It is an artful concession from a certain noble writer, that to take away a National Church, is as mere Enthusiasm as the notion which sets up Persecution; but it is of no use, since the ancient policy of a Public Leading in Religion (as another writer expresses it) which made room for the doctrine of the*  
*Infallibility*

## ADVERTISEMENT to the READER.

*Infallibility of the Church, has been exploded. There has succeeded into the place of the latter, a more just Idea of the authority of order; which may go a great way, to regulate the different apprehensions of Protestants on the article of conformity. Yet its apparent inefficacy hitherto cannot be better illustrated, than in the admirable expostulation of a very great Prelate,*

QUI MAXUME ÆQUO ANIMO ÆQUA NOSCIT;

*“ Are we not wonderfully jealous of the power of our own Church, which bath and desires less than ever any other in any age; but perfectly easy about the growth of popery, the most tyrannical empire over soul and body that can be, and the most peculiarly formidable to this Country?”*

*The intelligent Reader will readily discern, that the author has adopted, in some few places, the language and sentiments of the late learned and judicious Bishop Ellys, in his celebrated Plea for the Sacramental Test.*

A P L E A

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P L E A  
FOR THE  
SUBSCRIPTION  
OF THE  
CLERGY  
TO THE  
THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES.

**T**HE true origin of established Confessions of Faith in Protestant Churches is too well known to need any formal disquisition. They were expedient and necessary, as well to declare their doctrines for the instruction of their own members, as to obviate the imputation of many impious and extravagant opinions, and the slanders of their adversaries, that these were the natural consequences of departing from the infallibility of the Church of Rome. An unfeigned assent thereto, confirmed either by Subscription or the solemnity of an oath, became very early, and almost universally, an indispensable condition of qualifying their pastors for the ministry; and in some, of  
A admitting



admitting their lay-members to church-communion. The venerable Fathers of the Reformation have indeed been exculpated in part, for devising these expedients of peace and order; but in this more enlightened age, the matter of Subscription has been considered and treated by many different sorts of writers, as an unwarrantable encroachment on Christian Liberty.

It is the duty therefore of every one, who approves the establishment of the Church of England, to vindicate, as far as he can, those laws and constitutions which are its just security; and to shew, that they were not only reasonable and good in their institution, but likewise that they are expedient and useful to be continued. This indeed has been done in a great measure by the learned Bishop Burnet; who brought together most of the topics of any moment relating to the Subscriptions required of the Clergy; and having fixed upon the true principle of maintaining them, offered many ingenious solutions of the several difficulties, with which their case is supposed to be encumbered. Many objections were then made, and his friendly endeavours disdainfully rejected. Men of learning must needs differ in their apprehensions of things, but good men will bear with one another. Never did there appear less candour and moderation, than in the controversy that ensued; till at length the general principle, upon which alone the right and expediency

pediency of Subscription can be supported, has with great freedom been treated as false.

It may not therefore be improper to offer some farther thoughts upon this subject; which has very lately been taken up again in such a manner, as must unavoidably create much embarrassment and perplexity in the minds of many of the Clergy. This is intended in the following papers, for their benefit. And let it be premised, that though the writer may be thought by some Utopian projectors of absolute, free and uncontrouled liberty, to take the unfavourable side of the question; yet he professes himself a steady assertor of that perfect law of liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free; and has moreover a sacred regard for that inestimable treasure of Protestant Liberty, which is secured to us and our posterity under the present happy establishment.

In order to vindicate the laws and constitutions, which require the Clergy to subscribe to the articles of religion, the first step must be, to clear them from the charge of injustice, which has been aggravated in very invidious terms. " Nothing (it has been said) can be more cruel, nothing more inequitable, than to insist, that candidates for the ministry should give their solemn assent and consent to articles of faith, and modes of discipline and worship, which it is certain many of them must think to be inconsistent with the word of God, and which for that reason they are obliged to wrest



and distort from their natural, original meaning, before they can reconcile themselves to this article of conformity (a)." In opposition to which let it be observed; and the acute writer, who urges this so strongly, has himself made the observation, though he does not with so good a grace evade the force of it; that such of the divines of the church of England as have asserted her authority with the utmost zeal and in the highest terms, have yet extolled her moderation in laying no greater stress upon her confession, than the Remonstrants themselves in their temperate language seemed to contend for. Or let us appeal rather to the first and the best writer of the earliest times of the Reformation, Bishop Jewel; who had so large a share in all that was then done, and whose works have therefore been esteemed the best commentary on our articles. In them we shall see, what a deference was paid to the Holy Scriptures, what a latitude was left to private judgment. And if it be needful to shew, that the Church of England has not in reality assumed any greater authority since, upon other principles; to the extracts, which have been given (b), may be added many other citations; which relate as well to the Clergy, who subscribe, as to the laity and body of the people, who do only

(a) Confessional, p. 336.

(b) From Bp. Bull and Dr. Stebbing. Confessional, p. 55.



join in communion with us: and they all tend to shew the great difference between the imperious spirit of the Church of Rome, which imposes the belief of every one of her doctrines on the consciences of her Votaries, under the pains of anathemas and curses, and as articles of faith, and the moderation of the Church of England, which is very observable in the great caution and diffidence, with which its most learned and eminent divines have always expressed themselves in this matter. At the same time I will acknowledge without reserve; that I entertain a very indifferent opinion of their faith, as well as their sincerity, who in the defences and apologies which they make for their own Subscription, are constrained to explain it away to a general acquiescence, a public profession only, or a tacit persuasion. In this as well as other matters, men have been apt to be carried away by some leading bias into the extremes. The great Bishop Stillingfleet himself, than whom no one bore a greater share in the popish controversies, or succeeded in them with more honour, in opening a latitude for private judgment, did not precisely enough determine, what was to be given up to it, and what reserved for the Church. He was therefore thought to be of opinion, that those who subscribed to the articles were not obliged to believe them true. And to this purpose he says, that the Church requires Subscription to

the articles, nor as articles of faith, but as inferior truths (articles of religion, as our church calls them) which she expects a submission to in order to her peace and tranquillity (*c*). Yet in other parts of his writings he plainly declares, that in his judgment an absolute subscription, that is, a Subscription of belief, as opposed to a Subscription of peaceable submission, is enjoined as a term of ministerial conformity (*d*). The case of Mr. Chillingworth sufficiently shews his opinion at least of the moderation of our Church. His words are these: "for the Church of England I am persuaded, that the constant doctrine of it is so pure and orthodox, that whoever believes it and lives according to it, undoubtedly he shall be saved; and that there is no error in it, which may necessitate or warrant any man to disturb the peace or renounce the communion of it (*e*)."  
He confessed all this, and at the same time refused to subscribe. And wherefore? He was persuaded, that those who subscribe are supposed and required to subscribe to the truth of the articles; and he refused to subscribe, because he made a scruple of subscribing to the truth of one or two propositions, his doubts about which made him refuse Subscription to the articles in general.

(*c*) Rational Account, part I. c. 2.

(*d*) Unreasonableness of Separation. Preface.

(*e*) Preface to the Author of Charity maintained.



He was moreover willing to subscribe all, that (he imagined) the compilers of the articles did intend to secure and provide for; but he refused the legal Subscription, or the form of Subscription legally enjoined, which carried the matter something farther, than the first design of the articles did, in his opinion, intend. For the form of the statute requires men to declare their assent and subscribe to the articles, that is, to the truth of them; and therefore though he was ready to subscribe what was intended originally by the church, yet he refused to subscribe what was required afterwards by the state. However, that he did not object any injustice or unreasonableness to the legal form, is evident; because being afterwards appointed to the office of Chancellor of Sarum, he subscribed to those propositions, the truth of which he had doubted of. And this is a great testimony from a man of his reputation for probity, and learning, and firmness of mind: it is the testimony of the immortal Chillingworth himself; who disclaimed the defence of the protestant religion as it lay in systems and confessions, and appealed to the Bible only.

The objection therefore, that the restraining condition, which is laid upon the candidates for holy orders, is "cruel and inequitable," will, I humbly conceive, be entirely removed, when we come to shew, that there is not so much difficulty in reconciling themselves to "this article of conformity," as has been represented.

presented. Let us first examine it by the rule of public utility, whether it be not strictly just and equitable. And here such intimations as these, that "Jesus never intended his religion should be shut up in a national Church," or, "that he did not establish it upon exclusive conditions;" will not at all affect the main argument. It does not carry us back to the old puritanical principles of Cartwright and his followers; that all impositions in religion are unwarrantable, though enjoined by the highest authority. It rests upon the establishment which now is, and to maintain which has always been the important object of the wisdom of the Legislature. It resolves itself into this alternative: either none are to be admitted without a test to discover whether they assent to the established confession, or some other equivalent means of excluding those who dissent therefrom; or the establishment of the national Church must take its chance. And therefore, waving for the present many other important considerations, the candidate's capacity to be admitted to officiate as a minister, is justly restrained upon a principle generally acknowledged; to wit, that the religious and civil rights of subjects ought to be submitted to, and may be diminished for, the public good. For though strictly speaking it be undeniably true, that faith and conscience, having no dependence upon man's laws, are not to be compelled by human authority; yet since it is impossible



possible to keep the terms of communion sufficiently open to take in Christians of very different and contrary opinions concerning matters of importance, which are unavoidable; therefore in all establishments a power is vested in the Supremacy of the State, to exclude such as are obnoxious from many privileges and emoluments thereto belonging.

It is difficult to understand our Saviour's words at the time when He was arraigned before Pilate; " *Ἡ βασιλεία ἡ ἐμὴ οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου τούτου.*" " My Kingdom is not of this world;" in a sense declaratory of the true nature of the church of Christ upon earth. The expression *ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου* is opposed to *ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς*, 1 John ii. 16. and to *ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ*, 1 John iv. 4, 5, 6. And hence the passage has been understood by some, to respect the divine origin of Christ's Kingdom; and this may seem the more probable, because the words are addressed to Pilate, and have no relation to the prejudices of our Lord's Disciples concerning His temporal kingdom. And indeed these prejudices were so strong in their minds, that our Saviour did not much endeavour to contradict them, whilst He was upon earth; much less did he attempt it in the last melancholy period of his life, because they could not then have born it. But this leads us rather to consider the words as descriptive of the future state of Christ's Kingdom in heaven; the true

Kingdom of the Messiah; when being set at the right hand of God, He should send forth from thence His Holy Spirit to instruct and govern his people.

I have critically examined this text of Scripture, because several inferences have been drawn from it, not so admissible as Bishop Hoadly's general doctrine; "that Christ is himself the sole lawgiver and judge to his subjects in matters of conscience and eternal salvation." And this plain truth may be otherwise supported, without the sanction of a divine doctrine. Yet it does not preclude the authority of every Christian society to establish religious tests or modes of worship, that are agreeable to the Holy Scriptures; and if these have moreover the sanction of the civil magistrate, they are clearly defensible upon principles of policy and religion. Some reasons indeed there are both just and necessary, for which men ought to use their liberty, and not suffer themselves to be in bondage to any; when they are urged and constrained to believe or profess some points of doctrine, or to adventure upon some practices, which are contrary to the rule of faith, and to the law of God; or where they are utterly deprived of freedom of conscience, in professing what they inwardly believe; in these cases they do well to attend to the advice of the Apostle, "Ye are bought with a price, be not ye servants of men."



men.<sup>b</sup> But where nothing is approved or imposed contrary to the liberty purchased for us by Christ, a larger scope of liberty there cannot be, than a Toleration consisting in an Indulgence with respect to separate places of worship, or different modes of discipline, or in allowances of particular and occasional conformity. Such a Toleration pre-supposing the establishment of a national Church, it is impossible to understand Mr. Locke's arguments in its favour, as conclusive against the authority of any christian society to prescribe religious tests or modes of worship, which are agreeable to the Scriptures; and we do not contend for any other (f).

The insinuations that have been thrown out in the preface of the book (g), (which is commonly the fort of writers, wherein they mount the choicest of their artillery) concerning "a combination to adhere to the established system for some political purposes not fit to be owned," or, "a mere conformity to an ecclesiastical establishment, and a resolution to support and defend it at all events with or without reason," will not detract any thing from the estimation of the Clergy of the Church of England; who aver themselves to be constitutional conformists to the ecclesiastical establishment, supported by

(f) Confessional. Preface, p. 42.

(g) Ibid. p. 18, 19.

the public authority of the state, and by the concurrence of a very great number of learned and eminent men, whose profession has led them to a more intimate study of the Holy Scriptures; who have a steady zeal for the Protestant religion and government; and though willing to make any reasonable concessions, are apprehensive of the dangers that may arise to the public peace from alterations in the public forms of the church, where there is not, all things considered, a just and weighty occasion.

But let us come to what is allowed to be the fundamental position, upon which the authority of established confessions in protestant communions depends. "Every particular Church, considered as a society, has a right, as other societies have, to secure its own peace and welfare by all lawful means; and consequently, to prescribe such terms of communion as appear to be most expedient for the purpose; provided that nothing be required, under this pretence, which is contrary to the word of God, or inconsistent with the liberty of other churches (b)." To this it has been answered in the words of Bishop Hoadly, "that, by admitting the principle of self-defence and self-preservation in matters of re-

(b) Confessional, p. 22.



ligion, all the persecutions of the Heathens against the Christians, and even the Popish Inquisition may be justified (i);" which has been explained more fully thus: "If the Church of England, for example, has a right to fix her own terms of communion, and in consequence of that, to secure the obedience of her members by temporal rewards and penalties, the Church of Portugal must, upon the same principle, have an equal right to secure herself by the discipline of an holy office, or how otherwise she thinks proper (k)." All which amounts to this kind of reasoning: because any particular church, considered as a society, may secure its own peace and welfare by all lawful means, the greatest violences and barbarities may therefore be committed by the governors of every established church against them that dissent from it. The consequence is manifestly absurd; and it is suggested with an equal share of absurdity, that the position from which it is falsely deduced, must be false likewise. To this answer then and its explication I beg leave to object: that upon the principles of our establishment, no violence at all can be justly practised against any man on account of

(i) Speech for the Repeal of the Occasional Conformity and Schism Acts. Tindal's History, &c. vol. iv. p. 580.

(k) Confessional, p. 23.

his religion, merely as such; it will warrant only such a self-defence as may be necessary, with regard to the dispositions and powers of its opponents. The rights which the subjects of an established religion have, in virtue of the establishment, are upon the same footing as other rights of a civil nature. The legal authority, where-ever it is lodged, cannot be wrong in granting such advantages to the professors of any particular religion, as are implied in the notion of an establishment; they have moreover a claim to its protection, if their opponents either make, or threaten to make, any disturbances on their part against the establishment: otherwise violent methods will not be necessary, and therefore will not be lawful. Such a principle of self-defence and self-preservation, as can justify only such measures as are necessary for the security of the establishment, cannot be understood to justify others, which are not needful for that purpose, and therefore cannot justly be employed. Though the religious rights of an establishment may be defended against the combinations of wicked and designing men, just in the same manner as civil rights may; that is, by all prudential methods whatsoever; yet, I would ask, in what view can such prudential methods, as may be expedient or needful for a reasonable defence, make way for the admission of, or have any connection with, the



the persecutions of the heathens against the primitive christians, or the tortures of the Romish inquisition? If the church of England has a right to fix her own terms of communion, and to grant such temporal advantages as are implied in the notion of an establishment; he is a dexterous casuist indeed, and more worthy to be reckoned among the regular clerks of Ignatius than the zealous champions of Liberty, who infers from thence, that the church of Portugal has an equal right to use such kind of cruelties, as are employed by the Romish inquisitors against heretics and others, who are averse to their intolerant superstition.

In contradiction to this ill use that has sometimes been made of the principle of self-defence and self-preservation in matters of religion, the church of England for herself, and that great community which goes under the denomination of the Reformed Church, of which she has deservedly been honoured with the title of the chief and leading branch, declares instruction, exhortation, and admonition, to be the only legitimate means of advancing and preserving the true religion of Christ: she professes higher views, than to establish herself in peace and quiet upon the earth, by engaging mankind in an outward acknowledgment of christianity, by the means of temporal rewards and punishments: she

she uses no violence to compel men to conformity : she allows all the theories of christian liberty to stand upon their own foundations ; and deprives no man of his natural right to judge for himself in matters of religion, and to practise accordingly : she has condescended to alledge in her own defence the usage of protestant churches abroad ; and has the early practice of established confessions at home to appeal to, long before the tyrannical spirit of Rome prevailed ; yet these being human compositions, she acknowledges them to be subject to the examination of every intelligent christian, with the scriptures before him. And all this is very consistent with the authority, which she claims nevertheless, of interpreting the scriptures for all her members ; who being persons of sound judgment, and knowing their obligations to comply with or dissent from the establishment, did, in the instant of determining for themselves, in voluntarily subscribing or receiving her established confession, exclude themselves from the right of private judgment, and submit to the authority of the Church ; not as an infallible authority, but as an authority of order. She does not desire the laity to subscribe her articles ; because the reputation of her uniformity to all succeeding times, and the unity of doctrine for the regular instruction of the people, are abundantly secured by the Subscription



scription of her ministers, in testification of their common consent and agreement in the said doctrine; which is therefore required as an indispensable condition of qualifying themselves for pastors and teachers of the people, and for holding any preferment in the church.

If therefore it happens, that any who have subscribed to the articles of religion, do find in the progress of their studies, that what they assented to is inconsistent with their farther discoveries and improvements in theology, there is no room to retract; such a change of opinions is virtually disclaiming their Subscription, which admitted them into their function and preferments: the security which has been given to the public of the soundness of their faith and doctrines, and that they will instruct the people committed to their charge agreeably thereto, in the truth of the gospel, has the nature of an obligation, which stands in full force against them for the due performance of the conditions; and if these are no longer complied with, I know no other alternative, than to give up the emoluments which they enjoy under them. If there be some who rest satisfied with any thing less, they would surely be very unfair accusers of their brethren, who act conformably to their engagements with sincerity and a good conscience, "for adhering to the established system for some political purposes not fit to be

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be owned." To alledge, that they are sorry for what they did very early in life, inconsiderately too, and on the authority of others, is an aggravation rather than an excuse; and the air of freedom and pleasantry, with which they exculpate themselves, "that they will do so no more," "that they will never be caught again," is nugatory, and hardly consistent with "any liberal sentiments on the article of common honesty." They are bound to the Church by what they have done already, and, if we may judge from the unsurmountable difficulties they are under, have repeated several times; and she wishes them not to retain her emoluments, which they are entitled to no longer than they make good their own voluntary engagements. Yet she does not cast away her faithless sons from her; they cannot be insensible of her charity and moderation, whilst she cherishes them, though they have forsaken her. She excludes only the avowed followers of different sects and opinions; which might otherwise break in upon the scheme of uniformity, and consequently interrupt the peace and welfare, which this uniformity is intended to maintain by not admitting them to its emoluments.

Nor does the Church in all this matter claim any legislative authority as her own. If at any time she seems to exercise such an authority, it is in alliance and concurrence with the State.

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There is no room on the one hand to say, that the reformation of the public service hath been altogether lay and parliamentary; the ordinals and changes that have been made, were derived from the Convocation, which alone consulted about them; and the Parliament took care in enacting them, to shew, that they only added the force of a law to what had been done before by ecclesiastical authority. On the other hand, was it ever heard of, that the civil sanction, which alone makes any constitution to have the force of a law, gives it any other authority than a civil one? The Church herein does no more, as a Body, than what every Individual has a right to do, for himself. He examines a doctrine that is propounded; he forms his opinion upon it; and judges for himself, with whom he can hold communion, and from whom he must separate. And when such decisions are made by the body of the pastors of the Church, all persons within that church do owe great respect thereto: the Church may certainly decree, that such is their doctrine; and in order to maintain union and edification, may require some positive declarations about it from all, whom they admit to minister in holy things. This is the Authority of our Church in matters of Faith, in opposition to the infallibility of the Romish Church: she seeks elsewhere for a power to ratify and confirm her decrees: the

Legislators must give them the public sanction, according to their own persuasions: and after all, they derive only from thence the operation of all other laws; the doctrines, which are confirmed thereby, have no more truth than they had before, without any such publication; they do not oblige the consciences of the subjects, unless they come under the same persuasions; yet it highly becometh every good and peaceable member of the community, to wave or give up his religious, as well as his civil rights, to a legal authority. For a society or commonwealth cannot subsist, unless some form of religion be established therein; which establishment, being made for uniformity of worship, must extend to doctrine and discipline; without impugning any system of government which tolerates dissenters therefrom, with a proper regard to its own peace and security. So that the force of the plea for the Subscription of the Clergy to the Articles of Religion, lies in the expediency of the establishment of the national Church; and that it may be fully apprehended, it is proper to make some enlargement upon the several particulars that it contains.

For which purpose, the first point to be considered is; whether the admission of all to officiate as public ministers, without some test to discover, whether they do assent or not to the present establishment of the Church of England,



England, would not in the natural course of things endanger it. And here we may observe in general, that the Governors in all civilized States, not content to establish some religion, which they think most conducive to the honour of God and the advantage of the state; wherever any other notions of religious worship have been professed by such numbers of the subjects as are likely to rise into a competition with the establishment, which may break out into enmities and contests; have always thought fit to guard it in some degree against them, and to give it such a superiority as is necessary to preserve the public peace and welfare. This is a plain case; wherein, without doubt, the magistrate has his right of interposing reserved to him, without breaking in upon Christian liberty; and much more will it be his indispensable duty, to discountenance many gross and noxious errors, which prevail at any time among wicked and licentious men of various denominations; and which might otherwise acquire such strength, by uniting their efforts, as to break out into overt acts of opposition to the just and righteous regulations of civil society.

It was upon these principles, that after some progress had been made in the Reformation of the Church of England, it was thought to be a great defect, that a public confession of faith and doctrine was still wanting; to supply which,

which, the Articles of Religion were compiled, published, and enjoined to be subscribed. In which work care was taken, to establish the positive articles of religion; and to cut off the errors formerly introduced in the times of popery, and of late broached by the anabaptists and enthusiasts of Germany; avoiding the niceties of the schoolmen, or the peremptoriness of the writers of controversy; which was the likeliest means to prevent and compose diversity of opinions, and to remove the objection incident to every established religion, and which has been made to all the reformed establishments in Europe, that they are too narrow. We cannot however, consistently with the original intention of the compilers, suppose, that the articles were designed to be articles of peace, rather than of belief; so that the Subscription should be a compromise to teach nothing contrary to them, not a declaration that the subscribers believe agreeably thereto. Bishop Burnet absolutely explodes this conceit; saying, there was no reason or foundation for it at the time when the articles were enjoined to be subscribed; and that they who did subscribe to them, did either believe them to be true, or else did grossly prevaricate. And indeed a door would thereby be opened for the silent professors of every species of heresy, to intrude themselves into the bosom of the church; which in the end would be of very ill consequence



quence to its interest and safety. Yet if the case be rightly stated by the late Bishop of Bristol; if it be a true representation both of the original intention of the church, and the actual intention of the law; that "Subscription amounts to an approbation of and an assent to the doctrines contained in the articles, in the very sense which the compilers are supposed to have understood them in (1);" the question may very well be put, who can pretend to say, by what views or considerations the compilers of the articles were influenced? Is it not highly probable, that many questions were framed relating to them, which were given out to several Bishops and Divines for their opinions concerning them? who delivered in their several answers, which were examined and considered very maturely; some of them might think it more conducive to peace, to suffer some difficult and controvertible points to pass under dubious expressions, or in the very words of Scripture, without any decisive sense or explanation imposed upon them; while the method proposed by others, more commendable perhaps for their openness and sincerity, was, that every thing might be expressed with all the perspicuity and distinctness possible, in the aptest and precise terms, which the language of the times afforded: or may it not

(1) Bishop Conybeare's Sermon on Subscriptions.

be reasonable to suppose, that they intended some latitude of interpretation ; and having secured such truths as they were most concerned about, were content to leave matters of smaller moment undetermined ? The querist may urge farther : whilst it is positively laid down, that some articles, being formed in general terms, leave a latitude for private opinions, and others, being otherwise formed, leave no such latitude, how is the true sense to be ascertained ? If the wording of any article admits of two different senses, how can they both be defended as agreeable to the word of God ? Whilst Calvinists and Arminians subscribe in the different senses of absolute and conditionate decrees ; and learned personages find opinions flatly contradictory to each other in the same article (*m*) ; how is that diversity of opinions avoided, which was the original scope and intention of the articles ? To all which it may be answered in general : when an article, or any proposition contained therein, is fairly capable of different interpretations, he may undoubtedly be said to believe the truth of that article or proposition, who believes it true in any such sense as it will reasonably admit, without doing violence to the words, or contradicting what our Church has elsewhere taught and required us to acknowledge. For

(*m*) Dr. W. and Dr. B. concerning the Fifth Article.



where the words themselves do allow a liberty, the compilers certainly intended the same, or they would have confined the sense of such words more strictly; and we are not bound to abridge ourselves, where the church has left us free. There can be no room to complain of prevarication, if men of different notions unite in subscribing forms, wherein a laxity of interpretation was intended, or the legislator has not thought fit to determine in what particular sense the subscriber shall give his assent. For besides that such a latitude was perfectly agreeable to the candour and moderation of Cranmer and Ridley, who were the chief, if not the only, compilers; nothing is more evident in the ecclesiastical histories of the early times of the Reformation, than that the puritans, being respectable neither for their quality nor their numbers, as dissenters from the hierarchy, were not as yet obnoxious to the government; and consequently, that those prejudices to latitude and toleration had not yet been imbibed, which were afterwards so prevalent among the Bishops and Divines in the latter part of Queen Elizabeth's reign; who had an utter aversion to those gospel-privileges, as schismatical and puritanical. In the beginning of the last century another solution was given, upon a larger plan of liberty; that subscribers were not bound to the single sense of the compilers, as they were before; and

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good reason there was for it. By 13 Eliz. c. 14. intituled, " An Act for Ministers of the Church to be of sound Religion," which is the statutable authority requiring Subscription to the Thirty-nine Articles, the clergy are enjoined to declare their assent and subscribe to all the articles of religion, which only concern the confession of the true Christian faith and the doctrine of the Sacraments; but the thirty-sixth of the Constitutions and Canons ecclesiastical, confirmed in the year 1603, and the first of King James, is express for the clergy to subscribe to and acknowledge all and every article to be agreeable to the word of God. About this time, great and warm debates had arisen concerning many theological points, which had no relation to the doctrine of faith, or of the sacraments; and on the first publication of the Canons by the king's authority, many refused to subscribe the third article of the thirty-sixth canon (which concerneth the book of articles of religion) alledging, that they were ready to subscribe to the articles of religion concerning the doctrine of faith and the sacraments, which was all that was required by law; but that they were not bound to assent to and by their subscription approve them all. Hereupon a royal declaration was set forth, ratifying and confirming the articles of the Church of England; requiring all men to continue in the uniform profession thereof;

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prohibiting the least difference from the said articles ; and expressing, that they should be taken in the literal and grammatical sense. This rested, during the reigns of King James the first and his successor, upon the authority of the said declaration ; which having been issued by the former, and like other acts of supremacy, which being unconfirmed by the legislature are merely personal, dying with him, was revived by King Charles the first in the year 1628, and has ever since the Restoration been prefixed to the articles ; by what authority will be the next enquiry ; whereby a considerable abatement was made in their original strictness, and the plain and full meaning in the literal and grammatical sense was established in express words.

It has always been thought reasonable, that upon weighty and important considerations, according to the various exigencies of times and occasions, such changes and alterations should be made in things advisedly established at first, as to them that are in authority may seem necessary or expedient. Accordingly in the reigns of several princes since the Reformation, many alterations have been made in the established church ; yet so as that the main body and essentials of it have still continued the same to this day. This was most remarkably the case at the time of the Restoration. The great mischiefs and in-

conveniencies that had arisen during the late confusions, rendered it necessary, that something should be done for allaying those distempers, which the indisposition of the times had contracted. It seemed probable, that the use of the Liturgy, which had been discontinued, would return of course; but those men, who had made it their business to render the people disaffected thereto, were engaged, in point of interest and reputation, to use their utmost endeavours to hinder the restitution thereof. Great importunities were thereupon used with the king, that the Liturgy might be revived; and such alterations made therein, and additions thereunto, as were requisite for the ease of tender consciences. All this was done, and a new act was passed for the uniformity of public prayers; not that the book of common prayer, as it stood before established by law, did, in their opinion who were appointed to review it, contain in it any thing contrary to the word of God or to sound doctrine; or which a godly man might not with a good conscience use and submit unto; with the allowance of such just and favourable construction, as in common equity ought to be allowed to all human writings. In like manner, the people had been led during those times of confusion into many factions and schisms, to the great mischief and scandal of the reformed religion of the Church of England;



England; inſomuch that it was impoſſible, to open the terms of communion wide enough to receive them all; and it is likewise very notorious, that the largeſt and moſt comprehensive toleration would have given neither eaſe nor relief to the non-conformiſts of thoſe times; nothing leſs would have ſatiſfied them, than an entire new model of the church of England. And whatever advantages a plan of reformation might have had in any other reſpects, it is very ſuſpicious from the temper of the Houſe of Commons, which diſcovered itſelf ſoon, that no bill for that purpoſe would have been received; and moreover any alterations in the Thirty-nine Articles would have been of dangerous conſequence to ſome important doctrines, or laudable practices, of the eſta- bliſhed church.

The method therefore that was taken, was the beſt that could be thought of. At the inſtance, moſt probably, of Archbiſhop Laud, and with a view to accommodate the Armi- nians with a ſenſe of the articles, which was never thought of by the original compilers, King Charles had republiſhed his father's declaration in the ſame or nearly the ſame form, as that which ſtands before the Thirty-nine Articles in our preſent books. It ſeems too, that the biſhops and other divines, to whom his ſon and ſucceſſor King Charles the ſecond granted his commiſſion under the great ſeal

to review the book of common prayer, and to prepare such alterations and additions as they thought proper; and afterwards the convocations of the provinces of Canterbury and York, being called and assembled for the same purpose; adopted the same declaration. And this, I apprehend, is the true foundation of Bishop Burnet's doctrine concerning literal and grammatical senses; though he mentions the declaration only as it was originally set forth by James the first: for as such it could have no authority at the time he wrote his Exposition; though many good effects of it, in producing a general acquiescence, and allaying the fierceness of religious disputes, were still discernible. Without doubt, the Calvinists of those times complained as loudly of the sanction that was newly given to the declaration, as they did of Bishop Burnet's inference therefrom, for leaving the articles open to men of another persuasion; but the Arminians were stronger; and without such enlargement of sense, their Subscriptions could not so well agree with their opinions. Be that as it may. The declaration received from thenceforward a legal sanction. It became a new declaratory law. For it was a part of the contents of that one book, exhibited and presented to his Majesty by the Convocation, intituled, "The Book of Common Prayer, &c." which was established in the same year 1661 by the act of uniformity.

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It was no longer an act of the king's supremacy, but it became an act of the legislature; and has received no alteration since; for it remits the offenders against it for their punishment to the commission ecclesiastical, which was then in full force. The articles themselves having an undisputed right to the place which they occupy in the book of common prayer, as well as several prayers and thanksgivings that were added, being fitted to special occasions, and particularly the office for the baptism of such as are of riper years; because the same act of uniformity which establishes these, without specifying them in the title, enforces the articles likewise in some new cases (*n*), and moreover expressly construes and applies the Thirty-sixth Article thereto; the declaration having been republished, at the time we are speaking of, together with the articles (as the title informs us) and now standing before them, has a right also to the same place under the same sanction. The preface to the book of common prayer, which was prepared or revised by Bishop Wren, Bishop Skinner, Bishop Henchman, and Bishop Davies; and those other prefaces; the former concerning the public service of the church, which was

(*n*) Particularly the Case of Lecturers, as it has been stated by the inimitable pen of a late excellent Prelate.

received under the act of uniformity of King Edward the sixth, and the latter concerning ceremonies, drawn up by Bishop Sanderson; have always been esteemed by ecclesiastical Lawyers and Judges parts of the said book; and are declaratory likewise. These have no pretensions to the places which they occupy therein, otherwise than by virtue of the act of uniformity; and the declaration no less will support its claim to the same place, under the same authority.

And now the wonder ceases (e), that it is destitute of all the usual formalities of a royal declaration; that there is no royal signature at the head of it; no attestation of his majesty's command, by any of the great officers of the crown; no mention of the time when, nor the place whence it issued; that during the reign of Queen Anne, the title of it stood invariably as it had done from the first, "His Majesty's Declaration;" that it has never been acknowledged by any succeeding Prince, nor authenticated by the specific ratification of any. Taking it upon the footing merely of a royal declaration, I should esteem it of no more validity than the declaration of James the second for liberty of conscience; for I know of no power in the crown, to dispense with the ecclesiastical,

(e) Confessional, page 99, 100.



any more than the civil Law of the realm. The language too of the declaration, which was very consistent with the politics of the times wherein it was wrote, had it been continued since the Revolution by a mere act of Supremacy, would not have been admitted. " We will not endure any varying or departing from the doctrine and the discipline of the Church of England ; and if any person shall affix any new sense to any article, he shall be liable to our displeasure and the churches censure in our commission ecclesiastical." The literal and grammatical sense allowed therein was a political device, to let them into the privileges and emoluments of the church, who were most favoured, and could not otherwise come in consistently with their well-known opinions ; and so long as the judgment and authority of the ecclesiastical commission lasted, was a means to exclude others. But in after-times, when this restraint was taken off, and ecclesiastics were no longer the judges, what should be deemed a varying or departing from the doctrine and discipline of the church ; this indulgence of a latitude became productive of the most happy effects. Notwithstanding the declaration was originally intended, and applied, as a corrective to many notions unfavourable to monarchy, particularly to the lawfulness of resisting wicked and unrighteous princes, which

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the Calvinists had inferred from their theological principles of election and grace; yet in the end, it was subversive of those high-church principles, which it was contrived to support; and the doctrine of wilful rebellion being dropped in the limitation of the crown, it became the foundation of Revolution-principles.

The result will be this. The same Act of Uniformity, which recognizes the title of the articles, that they were agreed upon for the preventing diversity of opinions, admits likewise the declaration for literal and grammatical senses. A rule of interpretation is thereby authorized, which is moreover of the greatest use and importance to the present times. Most probably, there are still Calvinistical and Arminian divines of the Church of England; and a more numerous tribe of other denominations; who though all of the same confession, do not perhaps agree exactly in opinion with regard to many of the Thirty-nine articles of religion. Yet they all subscribe to them without any diversity of opinions; that is, in the sense of varying from the articles; not, of differing from each other. In those curious points wherein these differences lie, men of all sorts take the articles to be for themselves; there is still a consent touching true religion; and nobody has a right to ask, wherein one man differeth from another.



other. The judgment at common law, reported by Lord Chief Justice Coke, is hereby avoided; the substance of which is this; "that if any Subscription is allowed, which admits diversity of opinions, the statute 13 of Eliz. would be rendered of none effect." The diversity mentioned in the statute is avoided; whether the meaning of the compilers does not sufficiently appear by the nature of the subject, and by the ordinary signification of the words wherein it is expressed; or, notwithstanding the meaning is so plain that any unprejudiced and reasonable man may certainly understand it, yet the words will bear a double meaning; as indeed it is plainly impossible, that any thing should be delivered in such clear and certain words, as to be absolutely incapable of some other sense. Thus too there is deemed to be no desertion of the articles, in the several opinions concerning conditionate and absolute decrees; because, though contradictory to each other, they are justified on both sides, as being agreeable to the literal and grammatical sense: and though the article in the Apostles Creed, concerning the "going down of Christ into Hell," be (as Dr. Clarke has observed) universally understood in a sense very different from what the compilers intended; yet here will be no diversity of opinions within the meaning of the statute, if the words "hell" and "infern" will admit the

different senses, that have been affixed to them. Hence too it must be supposed to be, that all who subscribe to the articles in different senses, are fully satisfied in their own minds, that by their Subscription they fulfil the purport and intention of the statute; there is no desertion of the articles established; no "wresting or distorting them from their natural, original meaning;" and though Bishop Burnet's observation may be very just, that in many cases it is a great hardship to exclude some very deserving persons from the service of the church, by requiring a Subscription to so many particulars, concerning some of which they are not fully satisfied; yet the main difficulty, "in reconciling themselves to this article of conformity," proceeds from certain principles settled in their minds by time and education, beyond the power of themselves to alter them: I will not call them prejudices; because it is impossible to distinguish them from the truths there; and it is very injurious, to esteem another faulty in embracing any side of the question, because we, perhaps upon very different views, judge it to be false.

Nor is it the least utility of such a latitude of interpretation, as may be pleaded for under the Declaration; that it supersedes the pretended necessity of a review of the articles; because men of different opinions may very well acquiesce in them, as they are; and consequently  
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it has great weight to determine the question concerning the expediency of the measure, without entering into the argument against the measure itself, drawn from its supposed impracticability. I will therefore close this part of my argument with the following observations.

I. Where a religious Test has been established by the Church, with the sanction of the State, for the behoof of both ; it concerned the Imposers to take care, that its meaning be expressed in such words, as sufficiently manifest the same to the understanding of every reasonable man ; which if they do not, no law of equity or prudence bindeth him, on whom the Test is imposed, to confine the ambiguous sense ; or not subscribe to them in any sense, that the words will import.

II. Where a latitude of interpretation has been established ; it is better, to permit certain controverted points to rest under the approved moderation of the Church of England, than to be over-busy in matters of speculative divinity ; whence factions may be created, dangerous to civil government itself.

III. Especially “ in these latter times,” when “ the zeal and vigilance both of pastors and people in the Church of England against popery and popish emissaries, is visibly declined ; and little interruption is given to the unwearied endeavours of treacherous priests, strength-

strengthening themselves, and animated, by an influx of Jesuits, to pervert his Majesty's subjects to their intolerant superstition, and consequently from their allegiance (*p*); when moreover the learned and the unlearned are doing the work of Papists, and advance more than half-way to meet them (*q*); and our religion is debased to a trade, and a project to advance men's interested and ambitious views, by ways and artifices contrary to the clerical profession (*r*); this is a strong argument ad utrumque, that a review of the articles would be dangerous; in proportion to the avidity, wherewith every proposal of this sort is received, for reasons not fit to be owned: and I suppose, it seriously affects all, who have a hearty concern for the honour and support of our Protestant Church.

IV. With respect to the ecclesiastical Discipline, notwithstanding the reflection which has been thrown out, "that the Thirty-nine articles, considered as articles of communion, are of no manner of use to the church or significance to the laity, under a relaxation of discipline, extremely dishonourable to her governors, and highly scandalous to

(*p*) Confessional. Preface, p. 67, 68.

(*q*) Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of St. Alban's. 1765. p. 35.

(*r*) Ibid. p. 25, &c.



her members (s) ;" it is very obvious, that the expediency of a new model of stricter discipline may be supplied, in a great measure, by a bare attention to the maxim of the philosopher ; *quanto latius officiorum quam juris patet regula.*

But it may be, that some among the Dissenters, who know very well what their interests require, may urge their reasonable expectations ; smoothly professing, that they do not aim at any thing more, than an abolition of Subscriptions. In a matter of great importance to the public, the bare professions of interested parties cannot reasonably be expected to have much weight. Let us attend rather to the temper and conduct of their predecessors in the separation, and mark the resemblance between the present dissenters and them ; taking along with us the undeniable testimony of one, who knew them well, and was not at all prejudiced against them : " Il est certain que, si les Presbyteriens se voyent jamais en état d'agir sans opposition, ils ne seront point contentes qu'ils n'ayent ruiné de fonds en comble la hierarchie, & en general toute l'Eglise Anglicane (t)."

In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, when they refused the use of some ceremonies and

(s) Confessional, p. 94.

(t) Mr. Rapin's Dissertation on Whigs and Tories.

rites as superstitious, which were sufficiently known, by the queen's declaration, to be retained not out of any such regard to them; but partly, in order to maintain a fit decency in the worship of God; and much more, out of a charitable desire to keep as many as possible of the middle and lower sort of people in the communion of the Church; they were tolerated for a great while with much connivance and gentleness: when they called in question the superiority of Bishops, and pretended to a democracy in the Church; when some of them declared, that in the Church of England there was no lawful calling of ministers, nor any ministry; that the elections of ministers and bishops were tyrannous; and that Archbishops, Bishops, Deans, and Archdeacons were but offices and names of impiety; their propositions were with great candour debated and discussed. But what was begun perhaps "with laudable conceptions of the malignity of popish principles, and their fatal aspect upon the civil and religious rights of the people," ended in downright faction. For they affirmed, that the consent of the Magistrate was not to be attended to; they began to make many in doubt to take oaths, which is one of the fundamental parts of justice; having resolved not to be quiet, unless the public establishment was altered, and their own favourite platform of church-government

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and discipline settled in its room, they began to vaunt of their strength and the number of their partizans, and to use threats that their cause would prevail through uproar and violence. This, and much more to the same purpose, may be seen in Sir Francis Walsingham's Letter to Monsieur Critoy; which is recorded by Bishop Burnet, as a most important piece of history (*u*); being written by one of the wisest and most virtuous ministers of that age. Hereupon the State was compelled to hold somewhat a harder hand to restrain them than before, yet it was with as great moderation as the public peace would permit. And in this critical juncture, though the articles of religion could not be set out immediately, till the convocation met, yet they were prepared soon after; and for the present, a short profession of doctrine was agreed upon, which all incumbents were obliged to read and publish to their people. And was it reasonably to be expected, that the Queen should enter into any treaty afterwards with these men, to alter any thing in the Government of the church? Her apprehensions were from the Puritans. She had therefore very different notions of reformation, from what the original compilers of the articles had in the reign of King Edward. They meant to exclude all from the ministry,

(*u*) History of the Reformation, vol. ii. p. 418.

who had any tincture of popery; she on the contrary made very considerable abatements in those terms of protestant communion, which had been insisted on before; and for that purpose, the reviewers of King Edward's articles struck out a long passage against the real presence; and the rubrick, which had been added at the end of the Communion in the second book of King Edward, was now omitted. It does not appear, that this had any great influence to drive the Calvinists from the Communion of the Church (w). The violent contests that arose between the rigid Episcopalians and the Puritans, during the latter part of Queen Elizabeth's reign and some part of the reign of King James the first, were concerning subscriptions to those articles, which related to the hierarchy. Differences there were, but no great animosities between them in other matters. The Puritans did not refuse to subscribe to the doctrinal and Sacramental articles, or, which was the same thing, to subscribe to them all with an exception or pro-

(w) If on the other hand it be true, as is asserted in the Confessional, p. 87. "that this mutilation of the article concerning the real presence was one of those things, which drove the ancient Puritans out of the Established Church;" we may then change our posture of defence, and raise an apology for our present articles from the necessity of excluding the Puritans out of the church, by a test which none of them would comply with.

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testation to such as concerned church-government or discipline. But after the publication of the Canons of 1603, they refused to subscribe not only to the hierarchal articles, but to the rest likewise; because the purpose, if not the doctrine, of the church was somewhat varied in the matter of the legal Supremacy; Regal which, as extended to ecclesiastical matters, had been an offence from the beginning to Puritans, as well as Papists. The Calvinists in Holland strenuously insisted, that the church constituted, as theirs was, upon a republican model, had a power superior to the Magistrate; and as often as any extraordinary countenance was shewn to Papists, either in the reign of Queen Elizabeth or her Successor, the English Puritans gave no obscure intimations, that they entertained the same notions; and upon the same principle, they took great offence afterwards at the addition made by Archbishop Bancroft to the doctrine contained in the Thirty-seventh article of religion, as it is enlarged in the first article of the Thirty-sixth canon.

And is not the case much the same now? whatever objections the Dissenters may make to the doctrines of the church of England, it is the discipline which they dislike most: hence arises their non-acquiescence in the articles, and their repeated attempts to have them altered. And if we carry our view of

their former conduct farther, during the reigns of James the first and the two Charles's, shall we wonder that the church has been somewhat afraid to take them into her bosom? or rather, that she has suspected a formed design of entirely ruining her establishment, and raising one of their own in its stead. But we are told by a writer on their side, that "the body of the dissenters are friends to an establishment, and would be so even to our establishment, provided our foundations were a little larger, and some proper alterations were made;" and then he adds for our comfort, that "these alterations would not in the least lessen the honours or revenues of the Church, or render the establishment of it in the least more precarious or feeble (x)." I would ask him then in the words of the same learned and judicious Prelate, who introduced this courteous writer to my acquaintance; "are the doctrine, or the polity of the Church of England, or both, to be affected by these alterations?" probably not only her articles, but the Liturgy likewise, and other parts of the ecclesiastical constitution must be reformed; her whole polity is to be subverted, as not standing upon a scriptural foundation; her methods of ordination, institution, and jurisdiction must be changed, to satisfy this

(x) The Dispute better adjusted. Lond. 1732.



author and his adherents. " And are the Governors and Members of the church of England to have no satisfaction given to them, that these alterations are right to be made? might not some of them be repugnant or disparaging to doctrines, which they esteem very important truths? might not others break in upon ancient constitutions, which they think of apostolical or divine authority, and therefore, not to be given up to any demands (y)?" We may therefore, from the long experience which we have had of the spirit and temper of the dissenters towards the Church, lay down this position; that if pastors and teachers were to be authorized and sent forth among the people without a test to discover, whether they assent to the established confession; which test is deemed likewise a sufficient security for the exclusion of those who dissent therefrom, from the profits and emoluments of the ministry; the consequence would be, that the establishment of the national church would be very much endangered.

Nor would this danger arise only, or principally, from the Presbyterians, Independents, and Anabaptists; but there is a numerous body of Arians, Socinians, and Anti-trinita-

(y) Bishop Ellys's Plea for the Sacramental Test, &c. in his Tracts on the Spiritual and Temporal Liberty of Protestants in England. Part i. p. 137.

rians, who are very much increased of late years. And all these, though they differ among themselves, will probably agree in being enemies to the established church, and in their endeavours to weaken and subvert it; because in its subversion they may all hope to find their several advantages; an exemption at least from the unjust burden, as it is accounted, of paying to an established ministry.

But it must be observed farther, that the abolition of Subscriptions considered as a test, would not be likely to be made with such a general acquiescence, as some persons may imagine; who consider it as “an affair in which the prejudices of the people have nothing to do (z).” If it has been insinuated on the one-hand, “that the points in question are some fanciful systems, which have been ingrafted on the religion of the gospel (a);” it has been admitted on the other, “that whatever unsettles the foundations of government, affects the well-being of society, or any way disturbs the peace and quiet of the world, is of very destructive consequence; and the man who should retrieve fifty speculative truths at the expence of one faction, would be a very pernicious member of society (b).” I am willing to believe, and will venture to assert

(z) Confessional, p. 337.

(a) Ibid. p. 313.

(b) Ibid. p. 309.



it, that the body of the people were never less disposed to think disrespectfully of the doctrines and polity of the church of England. They were never more impatient to be driven from their old habits, and put out of their way, in the offices or any other matters of religion; especially those, which they themselves are to practise, and have a personal concern in. And whatever may be the grounds of this tenaciousness; whether they discern, that those who are led by their office to think continually on those things which concern religion, are most likely to judge rightly about them; or, because they cannot easily be brought to examine their own opinions and popular fashions, with attention sufficient to enable them to judge, either of the efficacy of the various schemes of innovating men, or the propriety and expediency of applying them; yet the consequence will be the same in either case: and it becomes them, who have the care of the public, to consider well in all proposals to be reduced to practice, the prejudices, tempers, and constitutions, that are known to be among us. There is moreover such an intimate connection between the ecclesiastical state and the civil; so that any alteration in the one would have a dangerous operation on the other; and the middle and lower sort of people have such

an inbred veneration for the Church; in which they have been taught to search the scriptures for the grounds of their faith; as well as for the civil constitution likewise, under which they enjoy their liberties without interruption; that they will not easily be brought off from their zealous attachments to either. Now in these dispositions of the nation, it is very easy to foresee; that in case Subscriptions, which are the fortifications of our national Church; the bulwark and security of its doctrine and polity, be removed out of the way of the several sorts of dissenters, of the men of latitude and free-thinkers, and of others too, who are averse or very indifferent to the Regal Government; great animosities and contests must ensue: for there will not be wanting, on the other side, men of interest and spirit, united by principles of duty and conscience, and by a sacred regard for the civil and religious liberties of their country, to act together, as occasion may require, for the dignity and support of the present Establishment.

## F I N I S

*See an errant Piece of Roguery in the CONFSSIONAL detected in the London Magazine for March 1767. And in the Magazine for the Month before A Conversation occasioned by the CONFSSIONAL. & continued in the succeeding ones*



